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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

uncle, diaspora, grown, blacks, language, family, bailey, home, queerness, culture, faraway countries, religious traditions, admonition, practices, weep, mutter, gullah geechee, year, cherish, railroads

00:06

I'm Tracy k Smith, and this is the slow down.

00:27

I recently discovered a photo of my father's grandmother, Fanny Turner, born in Alabama in 1870. As a black American woman, her history concerns me, the most of it remains a mystery. Growing up, I was curious about people who consider themselves to be Americans, and also something more children with another language. They spoke at home families who flew to faraway countries for vacations, and came home with tales of cousins and grandparents, and another culture in which they felt equally at home. For the first time in college, I met Haitian blacks Trinidadian blacks, and blacks from Ghana, Tanzania and elsewhere in Africa, friends whose manifestation of race was intriguing, because it was different from my own. What were the stories they'd grown up with in their families? What forms did advice take an admonition? A few years ago, I read a remarkable memoir called God, Dr. buzzard and the bolito man by Cornelia Bailey. Mrs. Bailey was a staunch champion and defender of the Gullah Geechee history and culture, a culture that took form on islands off the shores of Georgia and the Carolinas in the United States. When Mrs. Bailey traveled to Sierra Leone for the first time, she discovered that the language she'd grown up speaking, like the food she'd grown up eating, and many of the social and religious traditions she grew up practicing their distinct connections to the languages, foods and practices alive still in West Africa. That discovery was for her a revelation and an affirmation in any diaspora, as in any story of dispersion, there is both loss and abundance. Today's poem, a beautiful child by Omar Sacre ponders questions of diasporic inheritance and loss. A beautiful child by Omar Sacre after Jericho Brown. You are not as tired of diaspora poetry as I am of the diaspora. Sometimes, I think God that I was born inside an American made tank. Sometimes I weep within the beast. My uncle

works on the railroads and goes home to his nuclear family, loading my queerness from afar. He and I tend our silence a beautiful child until it speaks. Another uncle is a guard with two ex wives and a secret love of comic books. Tragedy made him the head of his family too soon. Don't weep for your dad. He said, weep for me. You didn't know him like I did. I have a third uncle, a mechanic who visits his home in Lebanon every year. And now I must admit English has failed me. I should say hello, my mother's brother. I should say, um, job, my father's brother. So you know which branch of the tree to cut or cherish? My uncle's are doused in industry, good sons of the state. They get on with what needs getting on language is their least favorite daughter. They use their mouths for breath and do their best to forget the world outside. I think they love where they come from. But in truth, I have never heard them say so. Except to mutter. They do not want to pay taxes in two countries. Come on. One is killing them already. And isn't that enough?

04:44

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